

Otoacariasis in *Turdus philomelos* by *Neocheyletiella megaphallos* (Acarina: Cheyletidae): first observations in Italy

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Neocheyletiella megaphallos is a *Cheyletidae* mite, parasite of *Estrilda erythronotus* (Viell.), described for the first time by Lawrence in 1959 (Lawrence RF 1959, Parasitol., 49:416-438). In Italy, the only reference about a close species goes back to 1889 by Berlese e Trouessat (Berlese A, Trouessart E, 1889, Bull.Biol.Sci.de l'ouest, 2:9-121), who isolated from a swallow a mite called *Cheyletiella microrhyncha*, now *Neocheyletiella microrhyncha* (Bernini F. et al, 1995 *Arachnida Acari*, Ed. Calderini, Bologna); because of its inadequate description in our opinion it can not be included in this genus for a certainty. The only species undoubtedly belonging to genus *Neocheyletiella* are *N.rohweri* Baker, *N.smallwoodae* Baker, *N.oudemansi* Volgin and *N.megaphallos* (Lawr.) and none of those has never been recorded up to now in Italy.

The biology of *N.megaphallos* has not been studied, its immature stages are not known and there is no information about its pathogenicity. Our observations concern the isolation of this mite in *Turdus philomelos* (*Turdidae*), a new host for this species. *N. megaphallos* was spread mainly on that bird's head, in the aftershafts of feathers, above all around its eyes, on its beak and inside the external auditory meatus. Here those mites formed cobwebs among the barbs, similar to those produced by *Bakericheyla chanayi* (Berl. e Trt.) in *Fringilla coelebs* L. (Baker, EW 1949, Proc.U.S.Nat.-Mus., 99: 267-320). In these sites, we observed the parasite's eggs and its immature stages inside a tangle of barbules stuck by a silky secretion produced by the mite. In the auditory meatus, those cobwebs were full of skin scales and crusty exudate produced as a reaction by the host. More inside, their quantity increased, forming a small occlusive plug, containing the biggest quantity of the parasite's eggs. The animal showed to be bothered, probably losing its balance partially, for it could not stand long on the perch of the cage.

Furthermore, it showed to have a strong itching and it beaked continuously its chest and wings, tearing out its feathers, some of which showed the cobwebs typical of the parasitosis. The examination of those cobwebs has allowed us to observe the mite. A laboratory test effected on three alive females of *N.megaphallos* has enabled us to note that these mites have a short resistance in the environment (72 hours about at 22°C and 60 % RH) and, if placed on human skin, they do not seem to be able to cause any sort of lesions.

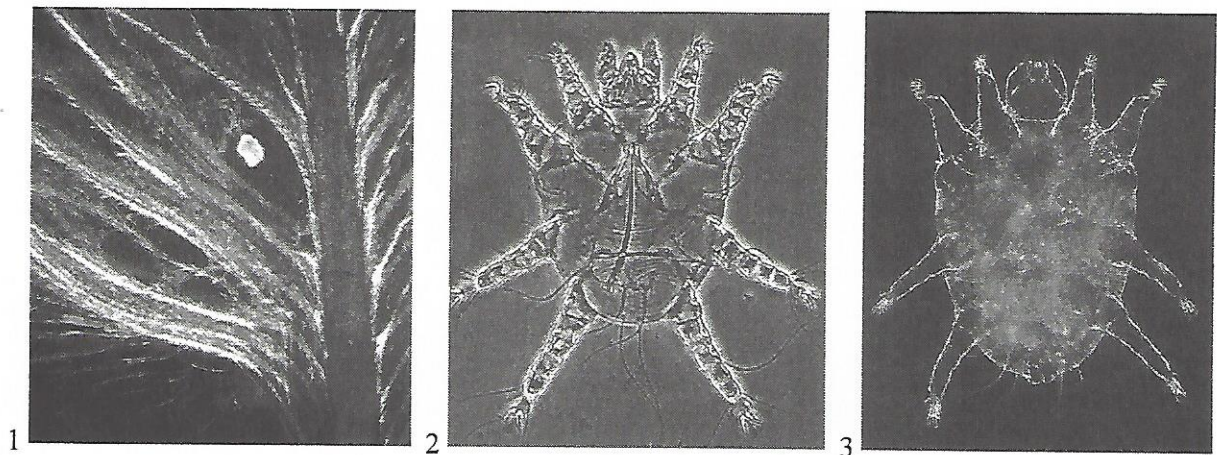


Fig.1: Eggs and adult of *Neocheyletiella megaphallos* among feather barbs; Fig.2: Male; Fig.3: Female